

Governor Greg Abbott Delivers 2019 Texas Inaugural Speech

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***Governor Abbott often deviates from prepared remarks*

It's an honor to take the oath as Governor of the greatest state in America.

We gather today for far more than just an inauguration. Today is the dawn of a transformative session that will usher in a new era. A new era for children, teachers, and taxpayers.

This will happen because of my partners here today: Speaker Bonnen, Lieutenant Governor Patrick, and all the members of the house and senate.

It is a blessing to embark upon this mission with Cecilia by my side. A fabulous mother to our wonderful daughter Audrey. She's a powerful advocate for Texas. And she made history by being the first Hispanic First Lady of Texas.

I can't let this moment pass without thanking our large and diverse family, especially my father-in-law Bill Phalen. Unfortunately, health prevents the most famous mother-in-law in Texas, mi suegra, Maria de la luz Segura Phalen, from being here today.

I also want to thank my brother Gary and his wife Denise. Gary is a retired Commander in the U.S. Navy. He served our nation for 20 years.

We must never forget we have the freedom to build a better Texas only because of the men and women who served in the U.S. military. If there's anyone who's worn the uniform of the U.S. Military, will you please stand or wave your hand so we can thank you for your service.

Now, some people say Texas is at an apex. They rightfully point to the fact that more Texans have jobs today than ever before. In fact, Texans created almost a million new jobs over the past 4 years and we set record lows for unemployment.

Texas remains the unrivaled national leader in agriculture, energy, and exports, and we dominate fields like healthcare, finance, and technology. The Texas brand of opportunity attracts more of our fellow Americans to our state than any other state.

Despite the exceptional heights to which Texas has climbed, I believe we have only risen to the foothills of what we can become. I know we can do even more for our fellow Texans.

We can do more to educate the next generation and keep them safe at school. More to advance our universities to meet the changes sweeping the 21st century. More to rein in the property tax

burden on our citizens. More to help our coastal region become resilient to catastrophic storms. More to crack down on human trafficking and the dangerous gangs promoting it.

All of this we can do. All of this we must do, because we live in the greatest state in America and we have an obligation to make it even better.

No doubt Texas has reached an unrivaled economic summit.

But from that perch, it is clear that too many young Texans have difficulty on their own journey to prosperity. Holding them back is an education system that's not adequate to put our students on the path to excellence that they deserve.

Yes, we are graduating more students from high school than ever before. At the same time, more students are graduating unprepared for college or a career.

Our students deserve better. Our teachers deserve better. Our taxpayers deserve better.

It is time for Texas to deliver real education reform. We don't have to look far for solutions.

Two years ago, Titche Elementary was one of the worst schools in Dallas. A year later, all that changed. Out of 145 elementary schools, Titche rose from being 132nd to the 2nd best elementary school in Dallas.

Five years ago, Dallas Independent School District had 43 failing campuses. Today, they have just four. And behavior is better. At Titche Elementary, school suspensions dropped by almost 90%. What changed?

A new principal was hired. He brought in highly rated teachers and set clear standards for students. He added people and policies that improved student success.

Know this: Titche Elementary is not an isolated example. Other districts in Texas like in San Antonio, Lubbock, and Pharr-San Juan have achieved similar results using similar strategies.

These achievements were possible because of bold leadership by superintendents and school boards who broke the mold making tough decisions to prioritize student achievement.

We must ensure destiny is not determined by zip code. Students from the most challenging circumstances can perform at the highest levels. But we have to give them the opportunity to succeed.

Success like this will not be achieved just by spending more money. It will be achieved by recruiting and retaining educators who deliver better outcomes for our students.

Today, we must dedicate ourselves to making our schools better than they have ever been.

This session, we must act to pay our best teachers more. We must reward teachers and school districts that achieve results. We must prioritize spending in the classroom, shore up the Teacher Retirement System, and yes, the state will invest more in public education.

The eyes of Texas are upon us. We have the opportunity and the obligation to get this right. We can and we will better fund education.

We will pay our teachers more and reward achievement in the classroom. We will reform a school finance system that robs one district to pay another. We will put our schools on a pathway to having all 3rd graders reading at grade level. We will prepare our high school students for college or a career. And we will do this without a court order.

I want to make this very clear. We will do what no one thought possible. We will finally fix school finance.

While one generation is struggling to climb the ladder of success, others have a ceiling on how high they can go. A ceiling imposed by an archaic property tax system.

A system that punishes families and businesses and prevents younger Texans from achieving their dream of homeownership.

Just a few blocks from here you see cranes operating above sprouting skyscrapers. In the shadow of those giant cranes, businesses are shuttering, unable to keep up with skyrocketing property taxes.

Go a few blocks further and you'll find residents forced out of their homes. Victims of unaffordable housing. A by-product of those same skyrocketing property taxes. That is not what Texas is about.

Texas is a place of hope and opportunity where anyone can achieve their dreams if they're willing to put in the work. But the promise that Texas offers is threatened by out of control property taxes.

As you know, the property tax burden is not unique to Austin. I've talked to Texans from Amarillo to Laredo, Texans in suburbs and inner cities, and they all demand property tax relief.

As one woman from Waco recently told me: "Governor, something has to be done. Some homeowners here in the poorest areas of Waco had their home values doubled by the appraisal district. How is that honest or fair? It's not."

This session, we must finally rein in skyrocketing property taxes in Texas.

Some people say we can't afford property tax reform. I say we can't afford not to reform a system that punishes homeowners, crushes businesses, and cripples our schools.

A state as prosperous as Texas should not punish seniors who have worked their entire lives to retire in a home they have already paid off. And it shouldn't force middle and low income Texans out of their neighborhoods.

To fix this, Texas must limit the ability of taxing authorities to raise your property taxes. At the same time, Texas must end unfunded mandates on cities and counties. And taxpayers should be given the power to fire their property tax appraiser.

Some cynics say we can't solve these intractable problems. They are too complex. Too political. Too hard. The cynics forget the legendary Texan resolve. The resolve of heroes who fought for Texas liberty while remembering the Alamo. That resolve has been passed from one generation of Texans to another. Through oil booms and busts, through Dust Bowls and devastating floods, through wind storms and billowing fires.

From moments of triumph to horrors of tragedy, generation after generation, Texans have been tested. And Texans have prevailed.

We live in a state where Texans have always tapped into our trademark resilience and ingenuity to rise above our challenges.

We live in a state where the grandson of a slave who was sold on the courthouse steps in Waco rose up to be Chief Justice of our highest court.

A state where a little girl shuffled from foster home to foster home drew strength from her grandparents in Houston. She went on to become the first American woman gymnast to win 4 Gold Medals in a single Olympics.

And yes, we live in a state where a young man can have his back broken in half and still rise up and be Governor of this great state.

We will muster that same resolve, that same ingenuity, to tackle the challenges of our time. And we will prevail.

Together, we will pay our teachers more. We will provide a better education for our students. We will make our schools safer. We will tackle skyrocketing property taxes. We will help Texans recover from storms that have ravaged our communities. We will do all this and more.

Together, we will ensure every generation reaches their mountaintop. And together, we will keep Texas the greatest state in America.

Thank you. God bless you all, and God bless Texas.